

NEWS RELEASE

**U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Mountain-Prairie Region
134 Union Boulevard
Lakewood, CO 80228**

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U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will not Conduct In-depth Review to Consider Listing the Pocket Gopher in Douglas County, Colorado

The U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service has reviewed a petition to list the pocket gopher in Douglas County, Colorado, under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and has concluded the petition did not provide substantial information suggesting that a more detailed study of the species is necessary. The negative finding was published today in the *Federal Register*.

The Service made the determination in response to a petition received from the Center for Native Ecosystems, Forest Guardians, Michael C. McGowan, and Jacob Smith. The petitioners identified five sites where the Douglas County pocket gopher had recently been known to occur, all in Douglas County, Colorado. Their petition was based largely on threats to these sites, inferring a decreasing population trend when compared to historic distributions.

The Service has information that the pocket gopher is more widespread than indicated in the petition, substantially more of the sites are currently occupied, and many of these occupied sites are protected from development as part of county-administered open space, Lowry Military Reservation lands, or various State-owned lands in Douglas, Arapahoe, and Elbert Counties, Colorado.

Field studies conducted by the Colorado Natural Heritage Program (CNHP) in 2002 identified five additional sites in southern Douglas, eastern Elbert, and southern Arapahoe Counties that were not identified in the petition, extending the known range of the gopher to the east and south.

Field observations conducted in 2003 by the Service, Colorado Division of Wildlife (CDOW), and others identified Douglas County pocket gopher spoil mounds, soil casts and eskers in an additional 36 locations, at least 6 of which are currently protected as open space, are on State park lands, or are currently being held in trust.

Although not the basis for the Service's decision, CDOW has taken the lead in developing a management strategy that will conserve the gopher. A major goal of this strategy is to fill several gaps in current knowledge of the gopher and its needs, including its current range and distribution, land use practices, and protection.

The Douglas County pocket gopher is a rodent measuring around nine inches. It is one of 58 northern pocket gopher subspecies, nine of which are located within Colorado. Pocket gophers have a small, flattened head, short neck, and muscular shoulders and forearms. Fur-lined cheek pouches (pockets), which open externally, distinguish pocket gophers from other rodents. Typical of all rodents, pocket gophers have prominent chisel-like, rootless incisors that grow continuously. Northern pocket gophers inhabit extensive burrow systems, which may be over 150 meters long, and are generally 10 to 45 centimeters below the surface.

The ESA provides for citizens to petition the Service to take listing actions, including adding species to the lists of threatened and endangered wildlife and plants as well as removing species from the lists. The Service is required to make a finding within 90 days on whether the petition presents substantial information that the petitioned action may be warranted.

For more information about this finding, please contact Bob Dach with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 134 Union Blvd., Lakewood, Colorado, 303-236-4264. The Service asks that the public submit any new information that becomes available concerning the status of the species or threats to it.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 545 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resources offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign and Native American tribal governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Assistance program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.

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